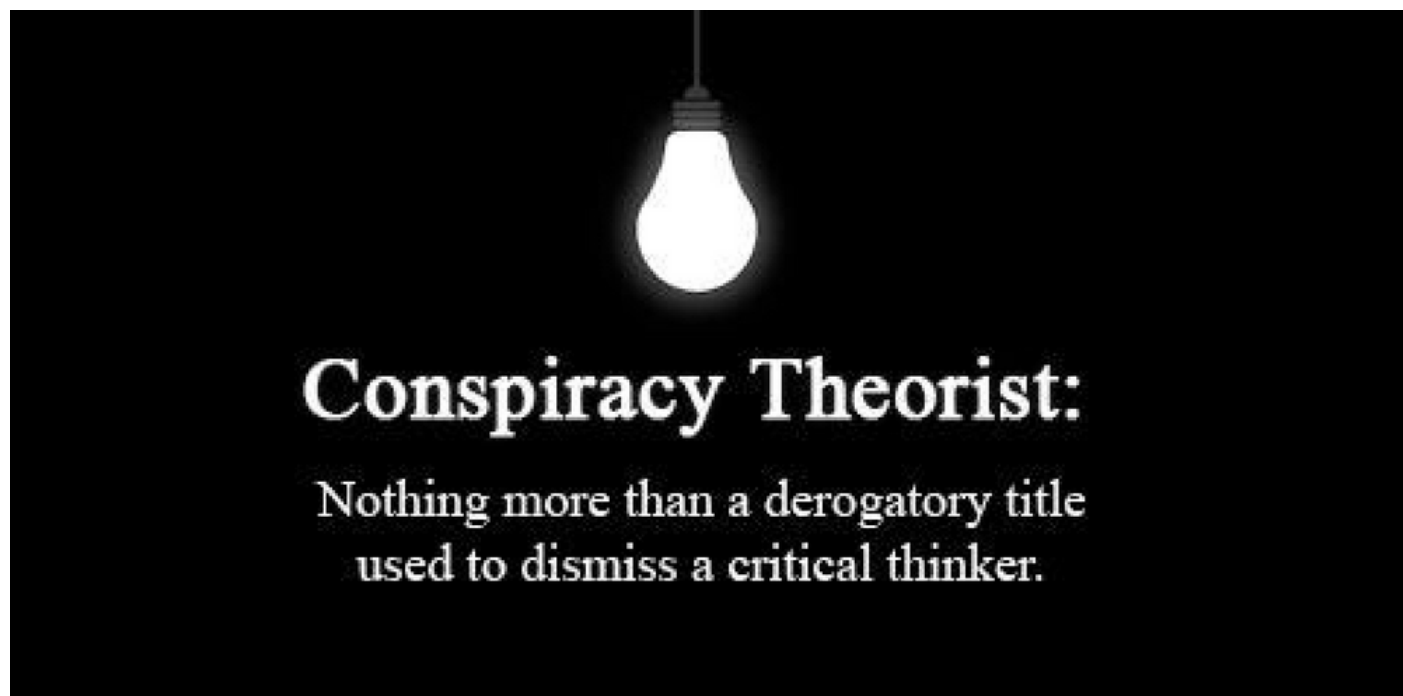


Some Call It Conspiracy Theory



Dylan Eleven

Oct 11, 2023 11 min



Off-Guardian.org

Iain Davis

Part 1

There are certain assumptions that are applied to anyone labelled a “conspiracy theorist”—and all of them are fallacies. Indeed, the term “conspiracy theory” is nothing more than a propaganda construct designed to silence debate and censor opinion on a range of subjects.

Subscribe

Most particularly, it is used as a pejorative to marginalise and discredit whoever challenge the pronouncements and edicts of the State and of the Establishment—that is, the public and private entities that control the State and that profit from the State.

Those of us who have legitimate criticisms of government and its institutions and representatives, who are therefore labelled “conspiracy theorists,” face a dilemma. We can embrace the term and attempt to redefine it or we can reject it outright. Either way, it is evident that the people who weaponise the “conspiracy theory” label will continue to use it as long as it serves their propaganda purposes.

One of the most insidious aspects of the “conspiracy theory” fabrication is that the falsehoods associated with the term have been successfully seeded into the public’s consciousness. Often, propagandists need do no more than slap this label on the targeted opinion and the audience will immediately dismiss that viewpoint as a “lunatic conspiracy theory.”

Sadly, this knee-jerk reaction is usually made absent any consideration or even familiarity with the evidence presented by that so-called “lunatic conspiracy theorist.”

This was the reason why “conspiracy theorist” label was created. The State and its propagandists do not want the public to even be aware of inconvenient evidence, let alone to examine it. The challenging evidence is buried under the “wild conspiracy theory” label, thereby signalling to the unsuspecting public that they should automatically reject all of the offered facts and evidence.

There are a number of components that collectively form the conspiracy theory canard. Let’s break them down:

- First, we have a group of people who supposedly can be identified as conspiracy theorists.
- Second, we have the allegation that all conspiracy theorists share an underlying psychological weakness.
- Third, conspiracy theory is said to threaten democracy by undermining “trust” in democratic institutions.
- Fourth, conspiracy theorists are purportedly prone to extremism and potential radicalisation.

- Fifth, conspiracy theory is accused of not being evidence-based.

According to the legacy media, there's a link between so-called "conspiracy theory" and the "far right" and "white supremacists." Guardian columnist George Monbiot, for example, wrote that:

[...] conspiracism is fascism's fuel. Almost all successful conspiracy theories originate with or land with the far right.

Apparently, this is a common belief held by people who imagine that "conspiracy theory" exists in the form they have been told it exists. It is also a bold claim from an alleged journalist. There is no evidence to support Monbiot's assertion.

Numerous studies have tried to identify the common traits of conspiracy theorists. These studies tend to initially identify their subject cohort simply through opinion surveys. If, for example, someone doesn't accept the official accounts of 9/11 or the Kennedy assassination, the researchers label them "conspiracy theorists."

Probably the largest demographic study of these alleged "conspiracy theorists" was undertaken by political scientists Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent for their 2014 book American Conspiracy Theories. They found that "conspiracy theorists" could not be categorised demographically.

Ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, employment and economic status and even political beliefs were not indicative. The only firm trait they could isolate was that conspiracy theorists, so-called, tended to be slightly older than the population average—suggesting, perhaps, that scepticism of State narratives increases with life experiences.

Professor Chris French made this observation, as reported by the BBC in 2019:

When you actually look at the demographic data, belief in conspiracies cuts across social class, it cuts across gender and it cuts across age. Equally, whether you're on the left or the right, you're just as likely to see plots against you.

This is not to deny that a minority of conspiracy theories are promoted by people on the far right of the political spectrum. Nor that some on the far left don't advocate other similar theories. A few "conspiracy theories" can be considered "racist" and/or "antisemitic." But there is no evidence to support the allegation that "conspiracy theorists," when compared to the general population, are any more or less likely to hold extreme political beliefs or promote extremist narratives.

George Monbiot is certainly not alone in his views, but his published opinion—namely, that conspiracy theories "originate with or land with the far right"—is complete nonsense. So let's discard his claim right now as ignorant claptrap.

Monbiot's allusion to "conspiracism" relates to the alleged psychological problems that supposedly lead people to become "conspiracy theorists." The "conspiracism" theory is a product of the worst kind of junk science. It is primarily based upon the notoriously flaky discipline of experimental psychology.

One of the seminal papers informing the theory of "conspiracism" is Dead and Alive: Beliefs in Contradictory Conspiracy Theories (Wood, Douglas & Sutton, 2012).

The researchers asked their "conspiracy theorist" subjects to rate the plausibility of various alleged conspiracy theories. They used a Likert-scale, where 1 is strongly disagree, 4 is neutral, and 7 is strongly agree. Some of the "theories" the subjects were asked to consider were contradictory.

For example, they asked the subjects to rate the plausibility of the notions that Princess Diana was murdered and that she faked her own death. Using this methodology, the researchers concluded:

While it has been known for some time that belief in one conspiracy theory appears to be associated with belief in others, only now do we know that this can even apply to conspiracy theories that are mutually contradictory.

But the researchers did not ask their subjects to exclude mutually contradictory theories—only to rate the plausibility of each individually. Thus, there was nothing in

their reported findings to support the conclusion they unscientifically reached.

Subsequent research has highlighted how ludicrous their falsely named “scientific conclusion” was. Yet, despite being roundly disproved, the erroneous assertion that conspiracy theorists believe contradictory theories simultaneously is repeated ad nauseam by the legacy media, politicians and academics alike. It forms just one of the groundless truisms spouted by those who spread the “conspiracism” myth.

One of, if not the, most influential scholar in the field of conspiracy research is the political scientist Joseph Uscinski. Like many other of his peers, he has tried to differentiate between evidence-based knowledge of real or “concrete” conspiracies, such as Iran-Contra or Watergate, and what scientific researchers allege to be the psychologically flawed and evidence-free views held by so-called “conspiracists.”

Uscinski cites the work of Professor Neil Levy as definitive. In Radically Socialized Knowledge and Conspiracy Theories, Levy stated:

The typical explanation of an event or process which attracts the label “conspiracy theory” is an explanation that conflicts with the account advanced by the relevant epistemic authorities. [...] A conspiracy theory that conflicts with the official story, where the official story is the explanation offered by the (relevant) epistemic authorities, is prima facie unwarranted. [...] It is because the relevant epistemic authorities — the distributed network of knowledge claim gatherers and testers that includes engineers and politics professors, security experts and journalists — have no doubts over the validity of the explanation that we accept it.

Simply put, the scientific definition of “conspiracy theory” is an opinion that conflicts with the official narrative as reported by the “epistemic authorities.” If you question what you are told by the State or by its “official” representatives or by the legacy media, you are a “conspiracy theorist” and, therefore, according to “the Science™,” mentally deranged.

All related “scientific research” on conspiracism and claimed conspiracy theory starts from the assumption that to question the State, the Establishment or the designated “epistemic authorities” is delusional. As hard as this fact may be for many to accept,

the effective working definition of “conspiracy theory” in the scientific literature is “an opinion that questions power.”

Clearly, this definition is political, not scientific. The supposed underlying psychology of “conspiracism,” which allegedly induces people to engage in “conspiratorial thinking,” is an assumption stemming from the academic’s political bias in favour of the State and its institutions. It has absolutely no scientific validity.

In his 1949 essay Citizenship and Social Class, sociologist TH Marshall examined and defined democratic ideals. He described them as a functioning system of rights. These rights include the right to freedom of thought and expression, including speech, peaceful protest, freedom of religion and belief, equality of justice, equal opportunity under the law, and so on.

Most of us who live in what we call representative democracies are familiar with these concepts. “Rights” and “freedoms” are often touted by our political leaders, academia and the legacy media as the cornerstones of our polity and culture. The entire purpose of representative democracy, it is alleged, is to empower “we the people” to hold decision-makers to account. “Questioning power” is a foundational democratic ideal.

If we accept the working scientific definition of “conspiracy theory,” then its inherent questioning of power and overt challenge to authority embodies perhaps the most important democratic principle of all and forms the bedrock of representative democracy. It is not unreasonable to aver that representative democracy cannot possibly exist without “conspiracy theory”—again, as it is defined in the scientific literature. As we can see, the claim that “conspiracy theory” threatens democratic institutions is without merit.

Representative democracy is not founded on public trust in the State, in its agents or in its representatives. On the contrary, representative democracy is built upon the right of the people to question the State, its agents and its representatives.

Autocracies and dictatorships demand public “trust.” Democracies do not. In a representative democracy, “trust” must first be earned and, through their actions, State institutions must constantly maintain whatever trust the public originally chose to invest in them. Wherever and whenever that “trust” is no longer warranted, the people

who live in a democracy are free to question, and ultimately dissolve, State institutions they don't trust.

Trust is not a democratic principle. Questioning power is.

Consider that, according to State institutions like the United Nations (UN),

Conspiracy theories cause real harm to people, to their health, and also to their physical safety. They amplify and legitimize misconceptions [. . .] and reinforce stereotypes which can fuel violence and violent extremist ideologies.

This is a wholly misleading statement. It is disinformation.

The most violent act imaginable, and the most extreme ideology of all, is war and the all-out commitment to it. Full-scale war is possible only when a State declares it. International war is solely within the purview of one entity: the State. Wars are frequently justified by the State using lies and deception. Furthermore, the ideology of war is unwaveringly promoted by the legacy media on behalf of the State.

To be clear: the UN alleges that when ordinary men and women from across all sectors of society—representing all races, economic classes and political views—exercise their democratic right to question power, they are expressing opinions that “fuel violence and violent extremist ideologies.”

For such an extraordinary, apparently anti-democratic allegation to be considered even remotely plausible, it must be based upon irreproachable evidence. Yet, as we shall see, the UN's claim is not based on any evidence at all.

In 2016, UN Special Rapporteur Ben Emmerson issued a report to the UN advising its member states on potential policies to counter extremism and terrorism. In his report, Emmerson noted the lack of a clear, agreed-upon definition of “extremism.” He reported that different UN member states defined “extremism” based upon their own political objectives and national interests. There was no single, cogent explanation of the “radicalisation” process. As he put it:

[M]any programmes directed at radicalisation [are] based on a simplistic understanding of the process as a fixed trajectory to violent extremism with identifiable markers along the way. [. . .] There is no authoritative statistical data on the pathways towards individual radicalisation.

A year later, in 2017, the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) delivered its report, “Countering Domestic Extremism.” The NAS suggested that domestic “violence and violent extremist ideologies” were the result of a complex interplay between a wide gamut of sociopolitical and economic factors, individual characteristics and life experiences.

The following year, in July 2018, the NAS view was reinforced by a team of researchers from Deakin University in a peer-reviewed article, “The 3 P’s of Radicalisation.” The Deakin scholars collated and reviewed all the available literature they could find on the process of radicalisation that potentially leads to violent extremism. They identified three main drivers: push, pull, and personal factors.

Push factors are the structural factors that propel people towards resentment, such as State repression, relative deprivation, poverty, and injustice. *Pull* factors are factors that make extremism seem attractive, like ideology, group identity and belonging, group incentives, and so on. *Personal* factors are individual character traits that make a person more or less susceptible to push or pull. These include psychological disorders, personality traits, traumatic life experiences, and so on.

Presently, the UN maintains that its report, *Journey To Extremism in Africa*, is “*the most extensive study yet on what drives people to violent extremism*.”

In keeping with all previous research, the Africa report concluded that radicalisation occurs through an intricate combination of influences and life experiences.

Specifically, the report noted:

We know the drivers and enablers of violent extremism are multiple, complex and context specific, while having religious, ideological, political, economic and historical dimensions. They defy easy analysis, and understanding of the phenomenon remains incomplete.

In its report called “Prevention of Violent Extremism”—published in June 2023—the UN noted that “deaths from terrorist activity have fallen considerably worldwide in recent years.” Yet, in its promotional literature for the same report, the UN claimed that the “rise of violent extremism profoundly threatens human security.”

How can the UN have it both ways? How can it be that a “rise of violent extremism” correlates with a considerable reduction in terrorist activity and associated deaths? This makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

And remember that in the Africa report, which the UN currently calls its “most extensive study yet,” the UN acknowledged that the causes of radicalisation “are multiple, complex and context specific” and “defy easy analysis.”

This thoroughly refutes the manifest ease with which the UN proclaims, without cause, that so-called conspiracy theories “fuel violence and violent extremist ideologies.” This begs the question: what on Earth does the UN think “violent extremism” is, if not terrorism?

The bottom line is that, by its own admission, the UN has absolutely no evidence to support any of its “conspiracy theory” assertions. Rather, the UN is simply making up its entire “conspiracism” thesis from whole cloth.

In reality, so-called “conspiracy theorists” are overwhelmingly ordinary people with legitimate opinions that span a wide range of issues. Their opinions do not lead them to adopt extremist ideologies or to commit violent acts. There is no evidence at all to support this widely promulgated contention.

Nor are alleged “conspiracy theorists” a unique group of malcontents with psychological problems. The only defining characteristic these people possess is that they exercise their right to question power.

They do not seek to undermine democracy but, rather, exercise the rights and freedoms that democracy is supposedly based upon. It is this behaviour that the State deems unacceptable and that leads the State and its “epistemic authorities,” including the legacy media, to label them “conspiracy theorists.”

This observation in no way implies that the conspiracy theorists are always right. Conspiracy theories can be bigoted. They can be ridiculous. They may lack supporting evidence. They may cause offence. And they are sometimes just plain wrong. In other words they are just like any other opinion. But, equally, there is nothing inherently inaccurate or dangerous about every opinion labelled “conspiracy theory.”

There is only one way to ascertain if an alleged conspiracy theory is valid or not: examine the evidence. Unfortunately, the conspiracy theory label was created specifically to discourage people from looking at the evidence.

There are countless examples of the conspiracy theory or theorist label being used to hide evidence, obscure facts and deny legitimate concerns. In Part 2, we will look at a few of these examples and explore the wider geopolitical context in which the conspiracy theory label is deployed.

Original Article: <https://off-guardian.org/2023/10/10/some-call-it-conspiracy-theory-part-1/>

DISPATCH		CLASSIFICATION SECRET	PROCESSING ACTION MARKED FOR INDEXING
TO: Chief, Certain Stations and Bases			X NO INDEXING REQUIRED
Document Number 1035-960			ONLY QUALIFIED DESK CAN JUDGE INDEXING
FROM: Chief, WOVVIEW		For FOIA Review on SEP 1976	CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM Release In Full 1996
SUBJECT: Countering Criticism of the Warren Report			
ACTION REQUIRED: REFERENCE PAUL H. KAUSHAN PSYCH FILE 12 ONES			
<p>THIS WAS POLLED TOGETHER BY NEG DEPT/OT OF CA STAFF WHICH CONSTITUTES WITH OTHERS THE MAIN PART OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL. REMAIN POWER THE THEMES AND RELEVANT GENERAL "DISPATCH" OF THE CASE. THE SUMMARY ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BY BENNETT. 23 JAN 1977</p> <p>1. Our Concern. From the day of President Kennedy's assassination on, there has been speculation about the responsibility for his murder. Although this was stemmed for a time by the Warren Commission report (which appeared at the end of September 1964), various writers have now had time to scan the Commission's published report and documents for new pretexts for questioning, and there has been a new wave of books and articles criticizing the Commission's findings. In most cases the critics have speculated as to the existence of some kind of conspiracy, and often they have implied that the Commission itself was involved. Presumably as a result of the increasing challenge to the Warren Commission's Report, a public opinion poll recently indicated that 465 of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone, while more than half of those polled thought that the Commission had left some questions unresolved. Doubtless polls abroad would show similar, or possibly more adverse, results.</p> <p>2. This trend of opinion is a matter of concern to the U.S. government, including our organization. The members of the Warren Commission were naturally chosen for their integrity, experience, and prominence. They represented both major parties, and they and their staff were deliberately drawn from all sections of the country. Just because of the standing of the Commissioners, efforts to impugn their rectitude and wisdom tend to cast doubt on the whole leadership of American society. Moreover, there seems to be an increasing tendency to hint that President Johnson himself, as the one person who might be said to have benefited, was in some way responsible for the assassination. Innuendo of such seriousness affects not only the individual concerned, but also the whole reputation of the American government. Our organization itself is directly involved: among other facts, we contributed information to the investigation. Conspiracy theories have frequently thrown suspicion on our organization, for example by falsely alleging that Lee Harvey Oswald worked for us. The aim of this dispatch is to provide material for countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists, so as to inhibit the circulation of such claims in other countries. Background information is supplied in a classified section and in a number of unclassified attachments.</p> <p>3. Action. We do not recommend that discussion of the assassination question be initiated where it is not already taking place. Where discussion is initiated, however, addressees are requested:</p>			
CLASSIFICATION SECRET		DISPATCH SYMBOL AND NUMBER BD 5847	DATE 4/1/67
9 attachments h/w		CLASSIFICATION SECRET	NO FILE NUMBER DESTROY WHEN NO LONGER NEEDED
1 - SECRET 8 - Unclassified		Batt.	

CONTINUATION OF DISPATCH		CLASSIFICATION SECRET	DISPATCH SYMBOL AND NUMBER BD 5847
<p>a. To discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors), pointing out that the Warren Commission made as thorough an investigation as humanly possible, that the charges of the critics are without serious foundation, and that further speculative discussion only plays into the hands of the opposition. Point out also that parts of the conspiracy talk appear to be deliberately generated by Communist propagandists. Urge them to use their influence to discourage unfounded and irresponsible speculation.</p> <p>b. To employ propaganda assets to answer and refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose. The unclassified attachments to this guidance should provide useful background material for passage to assets. Our play should point out, as applicable, that the critics are (i) wedded to theories adopted before the evidence was in, (ii) politically interested, (iii) financially interested, (iv) hasty and inaccurate in their research, or (v) infatuated with their own theories. In the course of discussions of the whole phenomenon of criticism, a useful strategy may be to single out Epstein's theory for attack, using the attached Fletcher Knebel article and Spertus piece for background. (Although Mark Lane's book is much less convincing than Epstein's and comes off badly where contested by knowledgeable critics, it is also much more difficult to answer as a whole, as one becomes lost in a morass of unrelated details.)</p> <p>4. In private or media discussion not directed at any particular writer, or in attacking publications which may be yet forthcoming, the following arguments should be useful:</p> <p>a. No significant new evidence has emerged which the Commission did not consider. The assassination is sometimes compared (e.g., by Joachim Joesten and Bertrand Russell) with the Dreyfus case; however, unlike that case, the attacks on the Warren Commission have produced no new evidence, no new culprits have been convincingly identified, and there is no agreement among the critics. (A better parallel, though an imperfect one, might be with the Reichstag fire of 1933, which some competent historians (Fritz Tobias, A.J.P. Taylor, D.C. Watt) now believe was set by Van der Lubbe on his own initiative, without acting for either Nazis or Communists; the Nazis tried to pin the blame on the Communists, but the latter have been much more successful in convincing the world that the Nazis were to blame.)</p> <p>b. Critics usually overvalue particular items and ignore others. They tend to place more emphasis on the recollections of individual eyewitnesses (which are less reliable and more divergent -- and hence offer more hand-holds for criticism) and less on ballistic, autopsy, and photographic evidence. A close examination of the Commission's records will usually show that the conflicting eyewitness accounts are quoted out of context, or were discarded by the Commission for good and sufficient reason.</p> <p>c. Conspiracy on the large scale often suggested would be impossible to conceal in the United States, esp. since informants could expect to receive large royalties, etc. Note that Robert Kennedy, Attorney General at the time and John F. Kennedy's brother, would be the last man to overlook or conceal any conspiracy. And as one reviewer pointed out, Congressman Gerald R. Ford would hardly have held his tongue for the sake of the Democratic administration, and Senator Russell would have had every political interest in exposing any mistakes on the part of Chief Justice Warren. A conspirator moreover would hardly choose a location for a shooting where so much depended on conditions beyond his control: the route, the speed of the cars, the moving target, the risk that the assassin would be discovered. A group of wealthy conspirators could have arranged much more secure conditions.</p> <p>d. Critics have often been enticed by a form of intellectual pride: they light on some theory and fall in love with it; they also scoff at the Commission because it did not always answer every question with a risk decision one way or the other. Actually, the make-up of the Commission and its staff was an excellent safeguard against over-commitment to any one theory, or against the illicit transformation of probabilities into certainties.</p>			
FORM 53a		CLASSIFICATION SECRET	DISPATCH SYMBOL AND NUMBER BD 5847
USE PREVIOUS EDITION		CONTINUED	PAGE NO. TWO

Where The Term Conspiracy Theorist Began

Subscribe to Truth11.com

Receive Articles By Email

☒ Subscribe now

Support Truth11.com • Make A Donation

- Become A Subscriber

Armed With The Truth • United We Stand